

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 48 | Number 5 (Summer 1986)

pps. 327-328

Phil Sheridan and His Army

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

"Phil Sheridan and His Army." *The Annals of Iowa* 48 (1986), 327-328.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9179>

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Book Reviews

Phil Sheridan and His Army, by Paul Andrew Hutton. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985. xvi, 479 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

Philip Henry Sheridan is well known for his Civil War exploits, but his later and longer career as Indian fighter and military commander has suffered from inadequate attention. Paul Andrew Hutton has ably rectified that inadequacy with a comprehensive study of Sheridan's later career.

After a mediocre career at West Point, including a year's suspension due to his inability to control his temper, Sheridan had his first close contact with native American culture when he was assigned to a unit in the Old Northwest. During the Civil War he gained a reputation for courage, tenacity, and skill, and by the war's end he had secured the rank of major general in the regular army. An assignment in Texas following the war revealed his predilection to favor the advice of his military superior and mentor, General Grant, over the instructions of the president. Then, as commanding officer of the Department of the Missouri, Sheridan was responsible for ensuring that the southern plains tribes complied with the treaties of 1867 and did not interfere with the westward movement of the railroad.

When Grant was elected president, General Sherman was appointed general of the army and Sheridan was elevated to the rank of lieutenant general and given his choice of commands. He chose to become the commanding general of the army's largest geographical division, the Military Division of the Missouri. Although the position kept him busy with paperwork and other mundane duties, Sheridan was committed to improving the army, he supported military scholarships through the establishment of military schools of application for promising young officers, he encouraged the scientific and military exploration of the West, and he promoted the westward expansion of the railroads. He also directed the army in the Red River and the Great Sioux Wars, which ended the power of plains Indians, and twice intervened in civil affairs in Chicago, in the aftermath of the great fire in 1871 and again during the labor strikes of 1877.

When General Sherman retired in 1883, Sheridan was appointed to replace him as general of the army, although the rank of full general was not bestowed until he was on his death bed. During his term as commanding general he consolidated many military posts, supported better training of the troops, and saw the surrender of Apaches under Geronimo.

Paul Andrew Hutton has given us a written portrait of Sheridan, the man and the general, warts and all. As a military man Sheridan was

intensely loyal to his superiors and to those subordinates who supported his viewpoints and methods. His attitude towards Indians was that of a mainstream nineteenth-century military man; he showed little sensitivity to the plight of the natives, believing that their problems were the natural result of contact and conflict with the superior American culture, to which their civilization must inevitably give way. Despite the implication of the title, the army as it existed in the second half of the nineteenth century was as much Sherman's as Sheridan's. Nevertheless, this well-researched and well-written biography will remain the standard work on Phil Sheridan against which all others must be measured.

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF NORTH DAKOTA

RONALD PHIL WARNER

Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War, by Frank L. Klement. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984. xiii, 263 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$25.00 cloth.

In recent decades historians have reexamined and rewritten the history of every phase of the Civil War except, according to Frank L. Klement, the history of the major Copperhead, or antiwar, societies in the North: the Knights of the Golden Circle (KGC), the Order of American Knights (OAK), and the Sons of Liberty (SOL). These secret "dark lantern" societies are still often described as the powerful and menacing organizations they were alleged to be during the war.

Both the KGC and the OAK originated in the South in the 1850s, the filibustering decade. Both were the products of the grandiose visions of enthusiasts who dreamed of rescuing southern civilization from the attacks of abolitionists by making the South the heart of a great slave empire carved out of Mexico, Central America, and the islands of the Caribbean. The Civil War forced both to adopt new programs. In 1860 the KGC pushed for the secession of the lower South, and in 1861 for the secession of the border region, including the southern parts of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. The OAK also shifted its operations to the North, attacking the allegedly dictatorial policies of Abraham Lincoln, especially his emancipation policy. In 1864 the newly organized SOL absorbed the OAK, attracted to its membership a number of prominent Democrats (among them Clement L. Vallandigham, who became "Supreme Commander"), and quickly emerged as the most militant organization opposed to the Lincoln administration.

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